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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study of an alternative, innovative high school designed to serve at-risk students and dropouts returning to public school. The PRIDE (Positive Responsible Individuals Desiring Education) Center, located in San Marcos (Texas) Consolidated Independent School District, opened in September 1989. The center's program includes innovations in discipline, instructional programming, pacing, schedule flexibility, admittance procedures, and student support services. In this study, qualitative and quantitative data (from interviews, the Culture-free Self Esteem Inventory for Adults, observations, and school documents) were collected to document student and staff characteristics, features of the alternative program, and changes in students' attitudes, behaviors, and academic success as they attend the alternative program. Results showed that school context variables associated with at-risk students were found in the PRIDE Center school students. Students clearly felt part of a family of learners, supported and accepted by faculty and other students. Faculty like and respect each student to an extent not usually experienced in public schools. PRIDE students also exhibited changes in school performance/attitude variables. Students seem to understand their work better because teachers explain more and students work at their own pace and have more desire to learn. (16 references) (MLH)

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A Study of An Alternative High School: Focus, Features and Impact

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A STUDY OF AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL: FOCUS, FEATURES, AND IMPACT

This is a study of an alternative, innovative high school designed to serve students who are at-risk and dropouts returning to public school. The PRIDE (Positive Responsible Individuals Desiring Education) Center, located in San Marcos CISD, opened in September 1989. The center's program includes innovations in discipline, instructional programming, pacing, schedule flexibility, admittance procedures, and student support services.

In this study, qualitative and quantitative data were collected to document the (a) characteristics of the students and staff of the school, (b) features of the alternative program, and (c) changes in students' attitudes, behaviors, and academic success as they attend the alternative program. The study will inform local policymakers regarding implementation of the initial year of the new program, provide direction for future staff development within the school, and extend the literature regarding programs for at-risk students and dropout recovery.

The objectives of this research project were to:

1. describe selected personal characteristics of a sample of students attending the alternative school;
2. compare the samples' school contexts while in the alternative school to their prior experiences in regular high school;
3. compare the samples' school performances while in the alternative school to their prior performances in the regular high school;
4. explore changes in the samples' attitudes including life plans, self esteem, attitudes toward school, and self-responsibility while attending the alternative school;
5. describe program features of the alternative school and the attitudes of faculty, administrative staff and students toward the program;
6. describe perceptions toward the program held by a sample of parents of students included in the study.

Whereas the major focus of this project was on the priority topic entitled at-risk/dropouts, other priority areas were peripherally addressed as they applied to the at-risk student: effective schools, parental involvement and support, and promotion and retention.

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.BACKGROUND

Scope of the Problem: Public schools face public pressure to improve and expand services for at-risk/dropout students. The United States General Accounting Office (1986) reports a national dropout rate of 14% for youth age 16-19. The dropout rate in Texas for the 1987-88 school year (the most recent data publicly reported) was 6.4% (Texas Education Agency, 1989). While already disturbingly high, these numbers are likely to increase according to recent projections. Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989) report U.S. Census Bureau projected increased in populations associated with being educationally disadvantaged: minority racial/ethnic group identity, living in a poverty household, living in a single-parent home, having a poorly educated mother, and having a non-English language background. These authors consider "at-risk" children to be included in the designation "educationally disadvantaged."

It is clear that public pressure to better meet the needs of this population will intensify given these demographic projections. Costs to society of large numbers of dropouts are difficult to determine; however, by one estimate, the cost to the nation for the 500,000 students per year who drop out is $50 billion in lost lifetime earnings (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). The U.S. General Accounting Office (1986) estimated that 1980 male high school graduates earned $1600 more during 1981 than male dropouts. The disparity between earnings for graduates and dropouts continues to increase: in 1966 the difference was 12%; in 1978 the difference was 24% (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1986). The costs of dropouts to society in terms of welfare payments, poor health, and crime are difficult to estimate. They must, however, be very high.

Definitions: The Texas State Board of Education defines a dropout as a student who has been absent for a period of 30 or more consecutive days without approved excuse or documented transfer from the public school of enrollment, or a student who has failed to reenroll during the first 30 consecutive days of a semester without completing the high school program (Texas Education Agency, 1989). The United States General Accounting Office defines dropouts as persons who are neither enrolled in school nor are high school graduates (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1986).

The "at-risk" student has also been defined in more than one way. According to Reynolds (1989), at-risk refers to "children who fall into various categories for which the base rates (or group frequencies) for experiencing educational difficulties are relatively high." Those categories include, for example, migrant lifestyle and learning disabilities. In a recent study of at-risk students conducted by Phi Delta Kappa, a broad definition of at-

risk was used: students were considered at-risk if they were likely "to fail either in school or in life" (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989). Wehlage (1989) defines at-risk as a description of a wide range of students who suffer from problems, like weak academic skills, which interfere with their success in school.

The factors related to at-risk students have been organized in several ways; one of the most useful is that developed by Wehlage (1989). He established three factor groups: family background, personal problems and school problems. Catterall (1987) reports a slightly different scheme: family background (e.g., SES), school context (e.g., academic track, peer group), and in-school performance (e.g., grades). This study focused upon variables in two categories: school contexts and in-school performances/attitudes.

School context variables commonly related to at-risk students are: large school size, nonacademic track, nonparticipation in extracurricular activities, fear of violence, dropouts in peer group, teachers and principals perceived as nonsupportive/alienated (Catterall, 1987; Firestone, Frymier and Gansneder, 1989; Gastright, 1989; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1986).

School performance/attitude variables commonly related to at-risk status are: low grades, excessive absences, failure of graduation tests, social behavior in conflict with teacher or peers, suspensions, negative response to instruction, low standardized test scores, course failure, negative attitude toward school, and retention in grade (Bishop, 1989; Caterall, 1987; Doyle, 1989; Frymier & Gansneder, 1989; Gastright, 1989; Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Reynolds, 1989; Rice, Toles, & Schulz, 1989; Slavin & Madden, 1989; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1986; Wehlage, 1989). Retention has been consistently found to be an extremely powerful predictor of moving from at-risk to dropout status (Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Slavin & Madden, 1989). In the Grissom & Shepard study of four school districts, students retained in one grade were 27%, 17%, 17% and 18%, respectively, more likely to dropout than those who were not retained.

Not only are these factors related to being at-risk, they are related to the student's likelihood of returning to school or entering a General Education Development (GED) program. According to the data from the High School and Beyond study cited by the U.S. General Accounting Office (1986), up to 50% of dropouts returned to school or entered GED programs within four years of dropping out. Of those who did reenter school or enroll in GED programs, 38% completed requirements within that four year period. Students were more likely to complete requirements for graduation when they had been in an academic rather than vocation or general track, had achieved higher rather than lower achievement test scores, and were upper rather than lower SES; this was especially true for blacks. In addition, if students had aspirations for college, were not married, and were not

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overage for the grade level they were also more likely to complete graduation requirements. In general, whites were more likely to complete graduation requirements than minorities; minority males were more likely than females to complete these requirements; and those in suburban areas were more likely to complete them than those in rural or urban areas.

This study investigated the presence of selected characteristics among the students attending the PRIDE Center in San Marcos as a baseline for describing the population rather than attempting to remedy those pre-existing factors which have contributed to the at-risk/dropout status. The study concentrated on selected school context and school performance/attitude factors such as changes in attitude toward school, peer group membership, academic progress, and responses to instruction.

Responses to at-risk students: Given the variety and severity of these factors, strong responses may be necessary to prevent the at-risk population from failing to graduate. The literature contains many descriptions of successful programs to address this problem--programs which address one or more of the following sets of factors: personal characteristics, family background, social context, and school performances/attitudes. As expected, most responses anchored in the public school setting are directed at those factors open to intervention by the school--school context variables and school performances/attitudes.

In response to the needs of the at-risk student, fundamental changes in the functions of school are indicated. Canady and Hotchkiss (1989) state that to be successful with at-risk students, schools must refocus from sorting and selecting students to teaching and learning for all students. Bishop (1989) emphasizes that programs for at-risk students must recognize and reward their efforts and achievements while Firestone (1989) suggests that effective programs emphasize mutual respect between students and teachers, make curriculum more relevant for students, and support teacher professionalism. The successful school program motivates students to complete school, increases their desire to learn, builds self-esteem, and enhances academic performance (Cuban, 1989). Features associated with "successful" programs include flexibility, personalized instruction, committed staff, and classroom communities (Cuban, 1989). In addition, the successful at-risk program, according to Gastright (1989), must seek to improve the social relations within the school and the curriculum the students are asked to complete. Two actions that facilitate this are promoting membership in the school and educational engagement in schoolwork.

This study investigated the extent to which selected characteristics of successful at-risk programs were present at the PRIDE Center. The perceptions of participants toward the

importance of these characteristics were also examined.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed were:

1. To what extent are selected school context variables associated with at-risk students present in the sample? (feelings of nonmembership, nonacademic track, dropouts in peer group, teacher/principal alienation).

2. How have these school context variables changed for the sample after entering the alternative program?

3. To what extent are selected school performance/attitude variables associated with at-risk students present in the sample? (low grades, excessive absences, failure of graduation tests, social conflicts with teachers or peers, suspensions, course failure, negative attitudes toward school, retention).

4. How have these school performance/attitude variables changed for the sample after entering the alternative program?

5. What program features identified through the literature characterize the alternative program? (changed focus, flexibility, personalized instruction, faculty commitment, classroom communities, recognition and reward, relevant curriculum, support for teacher professionalism).

6. What are the attitudes and perceptions of faculty and administration toward the alternative program and toward students in the program?

7. Does a sample of parents verify self-reported changes in performances/attitudes of students attending the alternative program?

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DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection began in January and continued until mid July. Data were collected by either the principal investigator or the research assistant. Training was provided to the research assistant, a senior level undergraduate student at SWT, by the principal investigator. Two observations and two interviews were conducted by the principal investigator and the research assistant simlutaneously. After each observation or interview, notes were compared and discussed to ensure subsequent consistent data collection and interpretation. During the study data records and interpretations were discussed on a weekly basis, which maintained consistency and allowed interesting but unexpected data to be explored more fully and more immediately.

Preliminary reports of the study's results were prepared in March and in July for dissemination at the The Third Annual Texas Conference on At-Risk Students sponsored by the Texas Education Agency and with the SMCISD School Board, respectively.

Interviews

Data collected included interviews with students currently attending the PRIDE Center (n = 21), faculty and administration (n = 8), and a sample of parents (n = 7). Interviews with students attending the PRIDE Center, faculty, and the campus administrator were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed by question and across questions. Faculty and the principal were interviewed individually in January and faculty were interviewed as a group and the principal interviewed individually again in June. Individual students were interviewed once with interviews beginning in January and continuing through May. The sample of parents was interviewed during May over the telephone. In addition, a decision was made to conduct telephone interviews with a sample of students who had attended but withdrawn from the PRIDE Center. For telephone interviews, notes were taken and expanded or clarified after the interview if necessary. Analysis proceeded directly from those notes. The parent and nonattendee interviews were analyzed by summarizing answers for each question.

Culture-Free Self Esteem Inventory for Adults

An attitude instrument, the Culture-Free Self Esteem Inventory for Adults (Battle, 1981) was administered to students by teachers during advisories in May. Students responded voluntarily and anonymously, and results are reported for the total group only. Because of the large number of students over eighteen years of age, the adult form of the SEI was chosen. The instrument contains 40 items and produces four subscales: general self-esteem, social self-esteem, personal self-esteem, and lie or defensiveness. Each item

indicates either high or low self esteem, and the student checks either yes or no to each item.

In terms of instrument characteristics, the author reports test-retest corrlations for each subscale of .82, .82, .56, and .78, respectively (Battle, 1981). The analysis of internal consistency (Kuder-Richardson 20) produced the following alpha coefficients: for general self esteem, .78; for social self-esteem, .57; for personal self-esteem, .72; and for the lie scale, .54. The instrument was subjected to content and construct validation processes. The content validation process consisted of developing contruct definition of self-esteem and writing items intended to cover all areas of the construct. The concurrent validation process entailed a correlational study of results from the SEI and Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory. Correlations were significant for all grade levels and for males and females: r values ranged from .66 to .91. The instrument seems to be of sufficient quality for reporting descriptive group results for this study.

The research design had originally envisioned repeated administration of the SEI; however, because of the limited time available after the grant was fully operational and the materials secured, the staff and researchers decided against repeated administration. It was felt that one month was an unreasonable time in which to expect measurable changes in students' self-concepts.

Observations

Classroom observations focusing upon teacher-student interactions were conducted beginning in January and continuing into June. As notes taken during the observation were typed, the observer expanded upon and clarified what was observed. Next each observation was analyzed for evidence of several phenomena: type of interactions occurring, emotional climate, response to instruction, self responsibility, format of class, academic focus, flexibility, community building, teacher professionalism, and critical events. Observations were then characterized for each class and across classes.

In addition to classroom observations, two graduation ceremonies were observed and documented.

Existing school documents

Existing school documents were also examined. These included permanent records, attendance and dismissal records for the PRIDE Center, the student handbook, and other selected printed material prepared by PRIDE staff summarizing goals and the year's

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accomplishments. From the students' permanent records, the following data were secured: the number of days absent for the two years prior to entry to the PRIDE Center, the number of high school credits earned the year prior to entry to the PRIDE Center and in total, grades repeated, the number of courses attempted and passed in each high school grade, the letter grades for the last two semesters of school prior to entry to the PRIDE Center. PRIDE Center records provided the number of days absent, the number of credits earned, student dismissals and reasons for the dismissals, and letter grades for courses completed.

Documents were analyzed to provide background information on the PRIDE Center and to describe students' previous and current school attendance and performance.

SITE AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The study site was the PRIDE (Positive Responsible Individuals Desiring Education) Center, an alternative academic high school located in the San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District. The center is a self-contained building on the campus of the San Marcos High School. During the school year a federal grant was received that financed a second building to expand clasroom space and add a day care facility.

Subjects were the students currently or previously attending the PRIDE Center, faculty and staff at the center, and a sample of students' parents. All subjects were invited to participate and informed that no penalty would result if they decided not to participate. Each subject was assigned a code number and data were maintained only in coded form.

Student Description

At any given time approximately 60 students attend the PRIDE Center. Because the PRIDE Center is a continuous entry and exit school, descriptions of the student body are constantly changing. A point-in-time description on May 31, 1990, finds 10 white and 48 hispanic students, and one black student. In this group were 34 male and 25 female students. The largest ethnic-gender group was the male hispanic group with 29.

Background student information was gathered from permanent records which documented absences, high school credits toward graduation, grades repeated, courses passes/attempted at each grade level, and grades for the last two full semesters prior to entry to the PRIDE Center. Because many students had transferred during their career or had dropped out of school, data varies from student to student and sometimes topic to topic for each student.

- Two-years prior to entry to the PRIDE Center, 18% of PRIDE students missed more

than 15 days of school: one year prior to entry to the PRIDE Center, 36% missed more than 15 days of school.

Number of Days Absent

	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	25+
Number of students						
a. 2 years prior to entry	11	20	38	6	5	3
b. 1 year prior to entry	7	14	35	11	8	13

- According to available records, 70 students had been enrolled in the ninth grade; 69 had enrolled in the tenth grade; 38 had enrolled in the eleventh grade; and 9 had enrolled in the twelfth grade. Students may have been counted more than once: each was included in the count for each grade in which he or she had been enrolled.

- Twelve students had been retained in the ninth grade; 28 had been retained in the tenth grade; 5 had been retained in the eleventh grade; and, none were retained in the twelfth grade.

- Before entering the PRIDE Center, 10 students had earned 1 to 5 credits toward graduation; 18 students had earned 6 to 10 credits; 23 students had earned 11 to 15 credits; and, 15 students had earned 16 to 20 credits.

Number of Credits Earned

	0	.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.5	5.0	5.5	6.0
Number of Students	3	1	2	1	4	9	8	7	6	3	3	4	4

- Seventy-five percent of the students in the ninth grade, 83% of the students in the tenth grade, 50% of the students in the eleventh grade, and 66% of the students in the twelfth grade passed 50% or more of the courses attempted at that grade. It should be remembered that the number of students enrolled in each grade drops dramatically between grades 10 and 12, from 69 to 38 to 9.

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Grade	Number of Students Passing Courses: Less than 50% courses passed	More than 50% courses passed
9	18	52
10	12	57
11	19	19
12	3	6

- Before entering the PRIDE Center, 7% of the grades earned by students were A's, 25% were B's, 38% were C's, 23% were F's, and 6% were U's.

Faculty Description

There were four faculty members, one principal, one counselor, and one youth worker/teacher at the beginning of the study. With the federal grant, an additional teacher was added in May. Faculty and administration of the PRIDE Center include two white male teachers, three white female teachers, one hispanic female teacher, one white female counselor, and one hispanic female principal. Teaching experience among faculty and administrator ranged from one to 18 years of experience. Individually teachers or the administrator reported a wide variety of backgrounds including 10 years at the junior high level, 13 years at the elementary level, four years as a counselor, working in a restaurant, working with retarded youth, and working with the Dallas Salesmanship Club for Emotionally Disturbed Boys. Degrees reported by the teachers were Bachelor's degrees in Physical Education, English, Psychology, Biology and Master's degrees in English, History, and Reading.

Others

A random sample of parents of students attending the PRIDE Center (n=15) was drawn, and attempts were made to contact them for telephone interviews. Parents of two white females, one white male, and four hispanic males provided information.

A decision was made during the study to attempt to interview students who had been attending but had withdrawn from the PRIDE Center. Of the 33 students who met this definition of "nonattendee", a random sample of 15 was drawn and attempts were made to contact them by telephone. The three hispanic individuals who were located and agreed to be interviewed by telephone compose the nonattendee sample.

FINDINGS

Findings are presented first in terms of the school context followed by summaries of interviews with faculty, students, and parents. Next the results of the observations, the document analysis, and the self-esteem instrument are presented.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PRIDE CENTER HANDBOOK

Goals. Upon acceptance to the PRIDE Center, the student is given the opportunity to attain the goal of a high school diploma. While working toward that goal, the student has the chance to start afresh in a new academic setting. The goal of the PRIDE Center is to provide a positive, caring atmosphere with high expectations for all students. The priority of the PRIDE Center is to improve students' academic achievement.

Attendance. The students are encouraged to come to school every day and to be punctual. The handbook stresses that to experience success, attendance is necessary . No homework is provided so all work towards completing each course has to be done at the school. Excessive tardiness and/or absences are against the rules of the PRIDE Center.

Students at the PRIDE Center follow the attendance policy of the district. According to district policy, student may only be absent for the following reasons:

1. personal sickness
2. sickness or death in the family
3. quarantine
4. weather or road conditions making trave dangerous

Advisory. Each student is assigned to an advisory group and a faculty mentor (advisor or friend) upon acceptance into the PRIDE Center. Each session (morning and afternoon) begins with every student attending a fifteen minute advisory which is led by a faculty mentor and which develops a group atmosphere where the students can feel free to express their thoughts, concerns and needs.

Dress. It is the responsibility of each student attending the PRIDE Center to dress in good taste in order to establish a proper atmosphere for learning.

Class scheduling. The scheduling of classes at the PRIDE Center is done on an individual basis. Although most students take four classes, some may be taking two, three, or five depending on their needs and capabilities. A new course is scheduled upon the completion of a course.

Each class must be attended each day, but the student may decide the order they attend the classes. They may also decide how much time to spend in each course, with the consent of the teachers involved. Class attendance and progress is monitored on a daily basis on a DATA card. New cards are issued each week and are given to the students at the beginning of each session by their faculty mentor. The card is presented to each teacher on entering and leaving each class. The card has room for coded comments, arrival and departure time, and the teacher's initials.

Classes may be "closed" to additional students at any particular hour if the maximum number of students are already in attendance with that teacher or during the teacher's planning or lunch time. The teacher puts a "CLOSED" sign outside the door when either of the above is in effect.

Resources. A resource center is available for the use of students for tutorials with SWT students or for study sessions.

Counseling. If students are found to be using their time unwisely, a faculty mentor will talk with them. If necessary, the student is referred to other personnel to work out any problems that arise.

Restricted Campus. Students attending the PRIDE Center are restricted from the high school campus during school hours without previous approval from the principal. The only students permitted on the campus are those attending classes in the Vocational Building.

Discipline. There is no detention hall and time is not spent dispensing with discipline problems. Students may lose the privilege of attending the PRIDE Center by not meeting the expectations outlined in the student handbook.

Evaluation. Mastery learning is the goal at the PRIDE Center. Students must average 80% or better on their classwork before they may take the first test over the relevant material. Classwork, however, does not count toward the final grade. The final grade is based on the student's mastered tests where 70% is considered mastery. The student is allowed to retest over a set of material three times to improve his grade.

If the student fails a test or merely wishes to improve his grade, the student must wait three days and achieve an 80% average on corrective exercises before retesting over the material. If a student fails all three attempts over a set of material, a conference is held with

the student, teacher, and counselor to determine the cause of the problem. A fourth test is possible, but is not considered until a conference has been held.

Graduation Exercises. As students meet the requirements for graduation, each takes part in a special graduation at the PRIDE Center. The ceremony is held during the school day with all students attending. The graduate is encouraged to invite their parents, guardians, friends, spouses or children.

Faculty Interviews

Because of the small number of faculty and staff at the PRIDE Center and the need to provide anonymity to each, responses are reported in composite form. No individual mentioned all areas reported for a question. These composite responses attempt to capture the scope and flavor of the faculty responses. This first interview occurred for each faculty member and the principal in late January or early February. Follow the summary of the first interviews will be the summary of the group faculty interview and the principal's interview conducted in June.

Faculty Interview 1

1. How would you describe the PRIDE Center?

The PRIDE Center was described as an open, caring family-like environment where students feel free to discuss situations openly.

Faculty stated that the students have the opportunity at the PRIDE Center to finish their education in a place where success is the key.

The PRIDE Center is seen by faculty as a motivational place that fosters positive self-worth, where the students get instant feedback and work in a unique integrated, self-paced program.

Faculty stated that the students receive lots of positive reinforcement.

2. What are the unique features of the PRIDE Center which distinguish it from regular high schools?

Teachers mentioned the the size of the classes which are small and intimate, the self-paced

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program, the four-hour school day, and not having classes regulated by bells as distinguishing characteristics. Faculty see the students attending the PRIDE Center because they want to be in school.

At the PRIDE Center the students have the option of "testing out" of classes. The faculty also felt that their teaching styles are different at the PRIDE Center where they focus more on meeting individual needs of each student.

Other distinguishing characteristics mentions were that teachers teach four or five subjects simultaneously in the classroom; the class schedule is flexible; and that students are responsible for themselves--getting help or guidance from the teacher when needed. Faculty also mentioned tutors and the computer lab as different from other schools.

3. What characteristics, skills and background experiences make you particularly suited for working with students at the PRIDE Center?

a. Characteristics:

Liking and respecting the students was mentioned most often by teachers followed in frequency by being understanding, being flexible and patient, trusting the students, and having a broad subject matter. Being an extrovert, being easy-going, energetic, sympathetic, a good listener, a good role model, being kind, taking risks, looking for ways to help without being judgmental, not talking down to the students, and not stereotyping were other characteristics mentioned teachers. Being willing to devote time to do the preparation work for the many different classes was mentioned by several teachers.

b. Skills

Broad subject knowledge, being organized, and being a good listener were given as skills that help in working with the students at the PRIDE Center. Also mentioned were ability to write curricula and plan.

c. Background experiences

Experience in mastery teaching, in writing curriculum, in previous teaching (ESL and Spanish, particularly) assignments were listed as useful experiences. In addition, experiences gained outside education in sales and counseling were mentioned.

4. How is teaching at the PRIDE Center different from teaching in a regular high school?

The PRIDE Center was described as a department in a regular high school. The faculty felt that they had better communication with the administrative staff so problems were resolved more easily. The faculty said they everyone works as a team with close attachments to the students. Several mentioned that they see changes in the self-concepts of students. Many levels of each subject are taught by each teacher during each class period. Faculty teach each student individually: the PRIDE Center has no ability grouping. Several faculty stated that the PRIDE Center is "like a family."

5. Has your concept of good teaching changed since you came to the PRIDE Center? If so, how and why?

Teachers varied extensively in their answers to this question. One teacher now realizes that mastery teaching really works, and that a different style of teaching has emerged in that class.

Another teacher said the concept of good teaching hadn't changed but that that opportunity to exhibit good teaching had changed. Good teaching can be expressed at the PRIDE Center where it couldn't at the previous school because of the physical constraints like class sizes and lack of esprit de corps.

One teacher said that concept of teaching had not changed at all because this was a first teaching experience besides substitute teaching. Here, there have only been two or three kids misbehaving in class all year: substitute teaching always assumed like a "circus-like atmosphere."

Another teacher isn't doing as much "teaching" as that teacher would like since there isn't always time to go to each student to see if the student needs help. There is more need at the PRIDE Center for individual help, but not always enough time to give it.

One teacher used to think "good teaching" was merely knowing the subject matter and being able to teach it. Now, that teacher realizes the need for flexibility and understanding and being able to communicate better one-on-one with the students.

6a. How does the PRIDE Center work to increase active participation by students in their learning?

Teachers felt that the self-pacing keeps the students actively involved since they plan their own schedules and, within reason, how much time to spend in each class. The students are given a list of objectives and activities that need to be covered before taking a test or quiz.

They are accountable for finishing those objectives and activities. There is no homework to be graded.

Faculty also felt that students are more active because of the family atmosphere: the students are excited for one another. If a student earns a half credit or an award for attendance, everyone knows because the proof is posted on the wall. According to the faculty, all students at the PRIDE Center receive the praise and attention they missed at their previous schools.

6b. How does the PRIDE Center worked to increase a sense of belonging in this school?

Each teacher interviewed mentioned the faculty advisories as a way of increasing a sense of belonging. Students start each day in a group advisory session led by a teacher.

The students are interviewed before being accepted to the PRIDE Center. According to the faculty, everything about the students' pasts comes out in the interview, and after that the students can start out fresh. They are constantly built up after they enter PRIDE Center and are treated like respected adults. The faculty stated that students know they were chosen and that they are winners. They are told how proud the faculty is of them and how excited the faculty are that the students made the choice to come to the PRIDE Center.

The faculty also mention activities such as celebrations for birthdays, graduations and half credits as creating a sense of belonging among students. There have been field trips where all students participated, and a food drive was organized because the students wanted it.

The staff see themselves as caring people who work together to make the students feel comfortable. The faculty felt that the principal listens to them and asks them for suggestions; she also talks to the students as a group or asks the teachers to talk to them if something important comes up.

The faculty also see the students as caring of each other. One of the students has cancer. Teachers stated that all the students felt special concern for him and many kept in touch with him. Three students designed and made a card which everyone signed for that student.

7a. What is your concept of success for your students in the PRIDE Center?

The faculty reported that every day they saw some kind of success: a unit passed, a test taken, a half credit earned or changing classifications from freshman to sophomore or from junior to senior.

In addition, the teachers saw success as the lack of failure for students who have known much failure. The faculty see students gaining positive self-concepts through the immediate progress the students are making. Students begin to see themselves as students who "can" go to college, according to the faculty.

Having the students learn that they must apply themselves, that things don't come easy, and that their studying has some kind of meaning were also reported by teachers as defining a concept of success. The students "feel" success, especially when they meet the ultimate success of graduation.

7b. How do you think the students define "success" at the PRIDE Center?

The faculty said that students measure their success on a daily basis by attending class, earning those half-credits, their grades, and mastery. When students see those half credits on the wall with their names on them--that's success according to the teachers. The students feel good about themselves.

8. Describe three challenges you have identified since you have been teaching at the PRIDE Center. How have you addressed these challenges?

Each faculty member answered this question differently. A listing of the challenges mentioned are as follows:

1. Being competent in my field in order to teach all levels of the subject during one class period;
2. Being able to communicate the subject to someone else;
3. Lack of facilities needed to conduct class activities;
4. Having enough adults to work individually with students;
5. Locating computer programs for the entire curriculum;
6. Getting the kids more motivated;
7. Learning how to appropriately interact with the students;
8. Organizing the curriculum so the students could be successful;
9. Accepting the views of the students who are mothers, to listen and not preach;
10. Wondering if I could handle the change;
11. Wondering if I would be able to handle 16 courses;
12. Wondering if I would I ever finish writing units and computer curricula;
13. Working more directly with students and being patient;
14. Learning how to read through transcripts, especially out-of-state;

15. Getting groups (parenting and recovery) started; and
16. Getting students to come in for help.

9. If you could change one thing about the PRIDE Center, what would it be?

Once again teachers offered a variety of changes. A listing is as follows:

1. Offer more classes, especially electives;
2. Enlarge the budget to hire more teachers and teacher's aides to give us more help and reduce the number of preparation hours;
3. Get abigger teacher's lounge/workspace since the current one is very small;
4. Change the location of the building to help us build our own identity;
5. Secure more computer software; and
6. Address some of the family problems the students might be having.

10. What is different from what you expected?

The composition of the student body is different from what one teacher expected. That teacher never thought there would be honors kids attending the PRIDE Center and expected all students to be slow learners.

Another teacher didn't realize how hard it would be to get the curriculum in place and to meet the student's needs. This teacher found the PRIDE Center to be truly challenging, time consuming, and difficult.

Another teacher expected to have all facilities necessary for the courses set up by January; they were not. Another teacher stated that the center never seemed to have enough paper.

11. How has working at the PRIDE Center met your expectations?

Two faculty members mentioned that they were told that working at the PRIDE Center would be a challenge, and it was. Also mentioned by two faculty members was the fact that there is a lot of curriculum writing, more than they had expected.

Several teachers reported they are excited about their jobs again and that they could use their training to better advantage. The teachers were pleased to feel comfortable in helping the students on a one-to-one basis. .

One teacher mentioned a hope the the teacher's own self-esteem would improve if that teacher took the position at the PRIDE Center. The hope was fulfilled.

12. What changes would you like to make for next year in your classroom or in the school?

Two teachers mentioned that they would like to see more audio visuals to help the students through some of the lessons. They would like to see more things on computer.

Another teacher stated that this year the students were grading their own papers and next year the teacher would like to grade them.

One teacher mentioned rearranging the curriculum to make it more supportive--breaking up some of the chapters to make them more manageable.

Another teacher mentioned that more teachers who could teach PE, health, reading, writing, and help the kids get ready for the TASP test are needed. The faculty would also like to see more electives like business math or accounting. Another would like to see a lab here.

One teacher wanted more discussion groups like the parenting group, and another teacher would like to find a classroom records management system.

13. Is there anything you would like to add to the interview? Something about the PRIDE Center which has been overlooked?

One teacher noted the parents who call just want to check on their children and how they are doing. That teacher felt that in a traditional school this rarely happens.

Other teachers thought that because the PRIDE students are in a fragile situation, the size of the school needs to stay small; that the PRIDE Center needs to retain the closeness of a family type atmosphere.

One teacher mentioned that teachers considering work in this environment need to be aware that you work hard. The teachers, as well as the students, grow and blossom with each half-credit that students earn.

Another teacher suggested screening the incoming students a little more carefully, perhaps by grades, behavior, prior teacher recommendations, and knowledge, to locate the serious students who can really benefit from the PRIDE Center.

One teacher suggested a larger building if the center continues to grow and more electives to meet graduation requirements.

Several teachers stated that every school district should have a PRIDE Center.

Faculty Interview 2

A group interview was given on June 20 with four faculty members present. The atmosphere was informal and the teachers agreed to answer any questions as a group rather than individually.

1. We first visited last January. Has your opinion of the PRIDE Center students and faculty changed since that time? If so, how?

When asked if their opinion of the PRIDE Center students and faculty had changed since their first interview, each teacher answered "yes". The students work on a higher level than the teachers had expected, and students' reasons for coming to school had changed. The teachers stated that students feel that there is something here for them and that students no longer view school as a negative experience.

The faculty reported that, as the year progressed, their attitudes toward students changed, and the faculty came to treat students more like adults so the teachers are not as involved with their problems at the end of the year. The faculty were less open to accept excuses arising from students' problems unless the problems were affecting their work.

The approach to curriculum has changed also--there is more streamlining. The faculty had prioritized within the curriculum to isolate the core elements. Faculty were also including more writing in the curriculum beyond the questions assigned over the lesson units.

2. What images do you see when you think back over the year?

The faculty members reported that they finally see the curriculum evolving. Writing the curriculum for many, many levels was a tremendous undertaking, but they now see the light at the end of the tunnel. They are more relaxed and less overwhelmed and can now look back critically at themselves and laugh. The faculty stated that they talk openly and often with one another and have found they can help each other.

The faculty mentioned as another image seeing the students graduate and seeing other students looking at the graduates and saying, "I can do that!"

The final image mentioned was that of a team. The faculty stressed that they reach a consensus on a topic and develop a plan together that is better than an individual's original plan.

3. Most of the PRIDE students have some family or personal problems which have affected their school success in the past. Which problems have been addressed most effectively by the PRIDE Center?

A variety of answers was offered to this question by the group. The faculty reported that the students' self esteem has improved, some are making good grades for the first time, and students are reading more and developing study skills.

Students are learning to use the flexibility within the school to negotiate options. For instance, if a student has trouble with reading and the teacher has developed a written assignment, the teacher may allow the assignment to be done orally. The teacher may ask some students to complete all assignments and be more selective for others. Some students are allowed to skip some assignments, review, take the test; only if they fail are they asked to go back and do the other assignments. The flexibility gives the students a second chance and opens them up to liking school according to the faculty.

4b. Which problems have proven most difficult to affect?

Attendance and being tardy were the problems named immediately and uniformly by all teachers in the group. Faculty reported that some students are surprised to see how many tardies they actually have. Faculty did not not feel that the school had been consistent throughout the year: they were too lenient during the school year and too strict during summer school. All agreed that this area needs work.

Another problem mentioned is delayed gratification. According to the faculty, the students need instant feedback. If they see progress, chances are much greater that they will continue to work toward graduation.

The faculty also reported that students are resistant to birth control and are poorly informed. Consequently, for a large portion of the student body, caring for their own children is problem.

Another area of difficulty mentioned by faculty was drug and alcohol abuse. Teachers said that the students are tired of hearing about drug and alcohol abuse; the school had films and a life issues group which targeted this area. The students have heard it all before and are bored with the topic. Given this attitude, however, the faculty felt there appeared to be less evidence of abuse than before. Students are becoming more responsible and are less alienated because they know the faculty cares if they use drugs even if their friends or parents may not.

5. You have a new teacher at the PRIDE Center. Has that affected the students and faculty? If so, how?

Teachers said they were a little leary of the new teacher at first. That opinion changed because the new teacher made an effort to get to know everyone right away, to talk with each faculty member, to ask for suggestions, and to share some of her ideas. The new teacher is in charge of the day care which was definitely seen by all faculty as a valuable addition to the school. Even though the new teacher is not teaching a full load, the faculty reported that she found teaching at the PRIDE Center harder than she expected. She came with certain expectations for behavior which caused her some problems when she substituted by the original faculty members. All faculty felt she was adjusting well to the school.

6. How has participating in this study affected you or your students this year?

Teachers said that they are looking forward to the feedback from the study and that they are more focused on what they are doing. They haven't felt threatened by the study but have wondered what was being written when observations were made in their classrooms One teacher reported that students really liked having the results of the self-esteem inventory returned to them. (Students who designed an individual code were given their own self-esteem score along with an interpretation guideline.)

A period of open reflection by the teachers led to additional comments.

They stated as a group the value of the atmosphere at the PRIDE Center. The small size of the PRIDE Center, in terms of student body and physical setting, was uniformly mentioned as an important aspect of the school. In addition the fact that the faculty has the opportunity to make many of their own decisions was important to the teachers. Teachers also reported that approximately 90% of their time at the PRIDE Center is spent on teaching and only 10% is spent on discipline. None had experienced this case before in teaching. Teachers reported that they were rarely in an adversarial position with a student at the PRIDE Center. The teachers also noticed that if they were having a problem with a student

that the others teachers were also. The teachers attributed this atmosphere to the smallness of the school.

Principal Interview 2

1. The PRIDE Center is about to complete its first year. What are your impressions of that year?

The principal first stated that the PRIDE Center was successful in meeting the goals established in the beginning by the staff. That included designing a new curriculum and instructional delivery system, new processes and innovations, and securing additional funding through grants. It was clear to the staff that more money would be needed to offer the type of programs necessary to serve the needs of the students, e.g., tutoring, parenting classes and a day care for children of students. In addition, the students needed more electives as the year progressed, and the PRIDE Center was eventually able to offer home economics, food and nutrition, child development, geography, and psychology. A cooperative relationship was established with the vocational education department of the high school which allowed four students to earn one and one-half credits on a work-study program. The counselor's office has established a good working relationship with an individual at the high school who had been assigned as the PRIDE Center contact person by the high school principal. The high school principal was specifically mentioned as being supportive of the PRIDE Center as it began operations.

The principal of the PRIDE Center also listed finding a clientele as one of the first year successes. The staff was not sure that students would choose to attend a new alternative school. Over 200 individuals have inquired about the PRIDE Center, some have picked up forms, others come in for interviews. Active recruitment involved several guest interviews of the principal, newspaper stories, word of mouth by counselors at other schools and students attending the PRIDE Center, and numerous presentations by the principal at various community organizations.

Another success had been the achievement record of the students. At the time of the interview, 13 students had completed graduation requirements and many have changed classification.

The major challenge facing the PRIDE Center mentioned by the principal is to change the public's image of the school. The public includes peers, the community, and other educators. Some see the PRIDE Center as a discipline school for bad kids, a reformatory.

The principal felt many teachers, administrators, and parents were aware of the differences of the PRIDE Center and the common perception of alternative programs. The principal is concerned that the PRIDE Center is being perceived as competition for the traditional high school and that certain jealousies have developed. The jealousies focus upon the money spent to establish the PRIDE Center, designated student parking, availability of the computer lab, the attractiveness of the building and grounds, and public attention.

The principal stated that misunderstandings have contributed to these animosities. The PRIDE Center building was, in fact, the home of the district's discipline program during previous years. As the site of that program, the building was in disrepair with torn carpet, holes in walls, dirty walls, and so forth. When the PRIDE Center was established the principal arranged for the repair of the building and students have taken pride in maintaining the school. Landscaping was arranged by the principal and the building is a pleasant place for students to attend.

The principal also mentioned the collaboration of the university with the PRIDE Center in terms of interest, support, tutors, grant writing, and publication of articles to share successes. The principal feels very secure in having the university available as a resource.

2. What images do you see when you think back over the year?

The principal first recalled the opening of school ceremonies which stay in mind. The principal had begun the school, starting with the name. To get to the point of opening it, and to experience the opening of a brand new school, was a wonderful experience.

The first graduate and the first graduation ceremony, where all the staff cried was named next by the principal.

The principal next recalled the first day that the whole staff got together when no body knew any one. Each was feeling uncomfortable with the others. The principal stated that the staff grew to be very close, but that first day the teachers showed up, the secretary showed up, the counselor showed up and they started a school.

The principal mentioned the transformation of students as they attend the PRIDE Center as the next image recalled. The students change their behavior, attitude, looks, body language, and how they relate with one another. The principal stated that boys cut their hair and remove their earrings, and girls who wore no make begin taking care of their hair, wearing makeup, and going on diets. They are feeling better about themselves and are more confident.

3. As the year progressed, we have noticed some changes were made in the school's procedures. Describe those changes and the reasons for them.

First was mentioned the attendance/tardy policy, how to stress the importance of attendance to this group of students given the flexibility of the program. The flexibility became a problem as the year progressed and the teachers consequently made adjustments.

At the start of school students had to attend each class each day for an unspecified amount of time. They would check into a class and then go to the restroom or get a coke. The problem became that they might stay just a few minutes before going on to another class and traffic in and out of the classroom became distracting.

Teachers decided that students should visit restrooms and vending machines before coming to class and that students needed to stay a minimum of 30 minutes each day in each class.

Another changes was in the procedures for "passing" a class. Students were originally allowed to pass a class, meaning the student was not required to attend each class each day for a set amount of time. As the year progressed teachers decided that students should ask the teacher's permission before passing that teacher's class. In May, the teachers decided that each teacher would ask the other teacher when a student requested to pass a class because students were taking advantage of the situation and reporting "passing with permission" when permission had not been request or given. Teachers were working on handbook changes to reflect the procedures for the upcoming school year.

Changes in procedures also included the addition of behavior codes on the attendance cards--WT, ET, IB, etc.--which indicate how well students making use of time and progressing.

4a. Most of the PRIDE students have some family or personal situations which have affected their school success in the past. Which problems have been most effectively addressed by faculty, students, and staff at the PRIDE Center?

The economics problems involved in going to school were first mentioned by the principal. Since students attend school for one-half day either in the morning or afternoon, students are able to hold a job to support themselves or their families. In some cases where PRIDE students have children, their own parents may be babysitting while the PRIDE students attend school and working when the PRIDE students are able to care for their own children.

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The day care facility has helped also with the economic situation since some students could not afford day care for their children.

The PRIDE Center has also been successful with students coming out of drug rehabilitation facilities who need a new setting away from the peer pressure of their old friends. The same is true for students on probation who need to be separated from their old groups. These students do not want to go back to the school where the peer pressure will continue.

4b. What problems have proven to be most difficult to affect?

For some students who attend another school and needed to get away from peer pressure but who wanted to earn the extracurricular letter, the PRIDE Center was not able to be of help. The student has to withdraw from the other school and in doing so will lose the opportunity to earn a letter.

Another problem which has proven difficult is the seventeen year old student who arrives at the PRIDE Center with only five credits toward graduation. The PRIDE Center has few electives and does not offer physical education credits. Finding enough electives to fulfill graduation requirements is not possible currently.

5. When you plan for next year at the PRIDE Center, what are your priorities?

The principal listed continued improvement in the curriculum and instructional program as the top priority. This included more writing in the curriculum and more higher order thinking skills activities in preparation for the TAAS. The school needs to add resource materials, software, a library, an encyclopaedia. and a science laboratory. The teachers this year had essentially a textbook with which to begin development of a curriculum. Unexpectedly the school was given an IBM lab and various software was previewed for purchase, but much needs to be done in this area.

6. How has this study affected you, the faculty, staff and students at the PRIDE Center this year?

The principal felt the study affected the school in a positive way, especially since one of the goals of the school during the first year was to evaluate progress and effectiveness. The study has become an integral part of that process. In addition the school sees the study as feedback for themselves and others; another alternative school in another city has already asked for a copy of the final report. Finally, the research staff conducted the study in such a way that neither students nor teachers were disturbed.

Student Interviews

Interviews were given at the PRIDE Center with 21 students participating. Each student had the opportunity to decline the interview if they wished. The interviews were taped, with the approval of the students, to aid in the analysis of their responses. The 14 questions asked were pre-planned, and each student was asked the same questions. Following is a brief summary of the answers given to each question:

1. Tell me about the PRIDE Center. What is it like to go to school here?

Of the 21 current students interviewed, nine mentioned the self-paced program as an important element of the PRIDE Center. Kindness of the teachers and being able to make their own choices was mentioned by four students. Ten students said the relaxed, less structured atmosphere and no semester exams was important to them.

2. How is it different from the school you went to before?

Twelve students mentioned that there are more choices they can make on their own at the PRIDE Center: they can choose to stay in a class longer if they get approval from the teachers and they are given the freedom to decide on their own to finish a lesson or to move on to the next class.

Five students mentioned that there is a better chance for success at the PRIDE Center. Tests can be taken three times, if necessary, to pass with mastery. (Each time the student is retested over a certain material, a new test is given.)

Ten students believe self-pacing is an important part of this program and six students said the students were more mature here. The students are more concerned about attendance and grades than they were at the high school. They are here to succeed and to graduate. They are here because they want to be a success.

3. How are the teachers different?

Eleven students believe the teachers at the PRIDE Center are more caring and understanding. They also believe the teachers are more relaxed with the students, friendlier and more personal. They believe this is mainly because of the small number of students. The teachers have more time to get to know each student and to give individual help.

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Two of the students indicated no difference in the teachers at their previous school and those at the PRIDE Center.

4. How is the principal different?

Four of the interviewed students noticed no difference between the principal at the PRIDE Center and the principal at their previous school. The students who did notice a difference said that this principal shows concern and is proud of them. Fifteen students said that the principal here knows them by name and three students mentioned that they go to see the principal because they want to, not because they are in trouble.

5. What do you like best about the PRIDE Center?

Eight students mentioned the fact that they like the PRIDE Center because they now have a chance to succeed. Six students like the self-paced program, and three students mentioned the half-day schedule as what they like best about the PRIDE Center. Five students said they like coming here because of the warm, family-like atmosphere. The small size of the school drew several comments.

6. Do you understand your work here better than you did at your previous school? How is it different from the work that teachers assigned at your previous school?

Sixteen students said they understand the work at the PRIDE Center better than they did at their previous school. The reasons for the better understanding are more explanation by the teacher (8), more time and working at their own pace (7), and desire to learn (4). Tutors available to help students were also mentioned.

One student said that the only difference was the teachers. Three students said that the work is the same.

7. Have you been absent much since you began attending the PRIDE Center? Is that more or less than at your previous school? Why?

Only two of the students interviewed said they have been absent the same or more since attending the PRIDE Center than they were at their previous school. The student who is absent more said the reason is that now, he doesn't lose credits if he is absent over a certain number of days. The remaining 19 students say they have been absent less at the PRIDE Center than they were at their previous school. The main reason (given by 14 students) was that they didn't want to go to school and didn't care before. Now, they want to go to

school and they try harder.

8. Do you have friends here? How are your friends here different from your friends at your previous school?

Nineteen of the interviewed students said they do have friends here. Of the two students who answered negatively to this question, one student is older than the others and the other just began attending the PRIDE Center.

Six students said their friends are the same as before. Six other students say the PRIDE Center is like a family with everyone knowing each other. Also noted by three students was the fact that the students are more mature here and the kids are not interested so much in drugs, parties, and drinking.

9. Did you participate in extracurricular activities like band or sports at your previous school?

Fourteen interviewed students participated in at least one extracurricular activity at some time during their enrollment in their previous school. The majority of those were in sports which included football, soccer, track, volleyball and tennis. Four students were in band and one student was in Brigade. Seven students did not participate in extracurricular activities. Low grades were cited as the reason some students gave for not being involved in those activities, while others gave no reason. One student said she was not in sports because she was pregnant.

10. What do you plan to do after you graduate?

Twelve of the students plan to go to a college or trade school after graduating from the PRIDE Center. Five students plan to enter the armed forces with the Marines being the top choice. Two students mentioned a career in cosmetology, and two students want to get a job immediately upon graduation.

11. Have you always planned to do that or has that changed since you came to the PRIDE Center?

For some students, the PRIDE Center has helped them have more confidence in themselves. It has made them see that what they want to do with their life is a possibility. Now they say they have a better chance. Concerning their current plans, thirteen students have either always planned what they will do after graduating or have had in mind for at

least two years what they want to do. The remainder of the students have not decided definately what they will do but believe the PRIDE Center has given them the chance to attain whatever goals they seek.

12. What about the PRIDE Center makes you feel successful? good about yourself?

The students mentioned several things that make them feel successful. Praise and being a part of the school was at the top of the list: six students gave that as a reason for feeling successful. Another five students say that earning credits and grades make them feel good about themselves. Knowing they will graduate (4), people believing in you (4) and the positive attitude of everyone (3) were all given as reasons for feeling successful. One student said he didn't really know a reason; he just knew he felt good. Another student said she made herself feel proud.

13. What would you do to improve the PRIDE Center?

Nine students said they would not change it in any way. They like it just as it is. Of the students who would make changes, four suggested adding elective courses. Three students would like to see the PRIDE Center enlarged and extending the hours, or adding summer school. Two students mentioned that they would like to have homework so they could finish school sooner. Other changes mentioned as possibilities were more books, a day care center, and not having the teachers "closed".

14. How would you describe a good teacher?

A description of a good teacher was varied considerably among the interviewed students. He/she should be understanding (4), be interested in the student and the subject (3), listen to the student (3), be friendly and open (3), get to know students (3), help the students to be comfortable enough to talk with the teacher (4), believe in them and smile.

Non-Attendee Interviews

A random sample of 15 was drawn from a list of students who had attended the PRIDE Center but were no longer attending. Attempts were made to contact these students by telephone. Three students were successfully contacted and agreed to be interviewed. Their answers are summarized below.

1. Did you attend the PRIDE Center?

Each confirmed that he or she had attended the PRIDE Center.

2. Is it correct that you are no longer attending?

Each confirmed that he or she was no longer attending the PRIDE Center.

3. What was it like to go to school there?

Students commented that this was a good program where they could work at their own pace. Students are able to get credits with more work and with teachers' help. Students stated that this was a better program than the high school even though the students had only attended the PRIDE Center a brief time (one or two months). It was seen as a good experience by the students.

4. Were you absent more or less at the PRIDE Center than you were at your previous school?

Each student stated that he or she had been absent less at the PRIDE Center than at the previous school. One had no absences at the PRIDE Center; one stated a little less. The third student stated that she had not attended high school at all because she was placed remedial classes and she knows she was smarter than the school believed she was.

5. Why are you not currently attending?

One stated that the PRIDE Center did a lot for him but he just didn't like going to school. Another stated that she was dismissed because of absences; home problems led to absences at the PRIDE Center. The third student stated that she was always talking with friends and the teachers at the PRIDE Center felt she was too immature for that setting.

6. Was there anything more the teachers and principal could have done to help you stay in school?

Two stated that the school had done a lot for them; one just didn't like going to school and the other decided to get help elsewhere. One student particularly mentioned the help of the counselor but said that she decided she needed to drop out and pursue a GED. One said that they could have counseled her more and asked her if she needed help (Note: in context of the home situation).

7. Would you return to the PRIDE Center if you could?

One student said yes, one said no, and the third has passed the GED and doesn't need the services any more.

Parent Interviews

A random sample of parents (n=25) of students attending the PRIDE Center was drawn and attempts were made to contact them by telephone for interviews. Seven parents were even able to provide information. Their answers are summarized below.

1. Does your child still go to the PRIDE Center? How long has she/ he attended?

Each parent confirmed that his or her child attended the PRIDE Center. One parent specifically said that her son had checked into the PRIDE Center and made his own arrangements to enter. Parents said that their students had been at the PRIDE Center from September or October (6) or October or November (1).

2. Does your child talk much about the center?

Six parents answered affirmatively and one said that it depends: when the student finishes a half-credit, the student becomes very excited about the center. One parent said that her student is only interested in getting through with high school. This student was a recovering drug abuser who had been in drug rehabilitation several times in the past. The student become somewhat discouraged when she had to take a biology test over and over but the parent said she was making progress at the PRIDE Center, going from a sophomore to a senior in less than a year.

3. What does he/she say?

Parents reported that students (5) talk about liking the PRIDE Center. One parent stated that her son had nothing negative to say about the PRIDE Center. Students told parents that they like working at their own pace (2) and that no one rushes them (2). Students told parents that, if you need help, the teachers are there for you. Student also talked about feeling good about the teachers and grades the students are receiving (2) or that they are doing well (2). One parent stated that her student talks about the courses and where she is in the different classes (the progress being made).

4. Have you noticed any changes about your child's dress or attitude since entering the PRIDE Center?

Two parents stated that they saw no change. One stated that her son had always interested in school.

Five parents did see changes, covering a variety of areas. One stated that her daughter had always tried to look her best but looked even better now. Another stated that in regular school her son was frustrated, angry, and moody and now he is happy. A third parent said her student was going to church now and is happier. A fourth parent said that her son's attitude changed within a week, the student was more encouraged, and is now thinking of college. Before coming to the PRIDE Center, he felt like a failure and that no one was there for him. The parent said the student had made a ninety-degree turn. Finally, the fifth parent said that her daughter seemed more responsible for her own work.

5. Is there anything you would like to add?

One parent stated that the PRIDE Center was wonderful, an answer to their prayers. The same parent said that the change in the student was amazing. The parent said that the principal and counselor were very understanding. The sole negative comment was that there were not enough free electives offered at the PRIDE Center.

Another parent said that if it hadn't been for the PRIDE Center, the parent had no idea where the student would be. The parent is a strong supporter of the PRIDE Center. Her son is more encouraged about college, a technical school or the service. He has direction now. The sole negative comment regarded the requirement that PRIDE students couldn't have anything to do with regular high school activities. However, as soon as the student began earning half-credits, he didn't worry about activities anymore.

A third parent stated support for allowing students to work at their own pace so they can catch up.

Another parent expressed gratitude for the program because her student would not be in school if it were not for the PRIDE Center.

Another parent reported that his student was asked if he wanted to return to the old school for the next school year. The student answered that he didn't think so, that he wants to

stay at the PRIDE Center.

One parent said she believes that the math class should have more teacher involvement beyond assisting students as they work on their own.

Classroom Observations

Observations lasting approximately 30 minutes were made in five different classrooms. Observations were conducted twice for each of the academic core subjects (English, social studies, science, and mathematics) and once for the child development class since that class began in May. The computer room where one teacher provided tutoring and computer assisted instruction was not observed. There were a total of nine observations.

During these observations, a narrative record was made and subsequently analyzed for information about interactions between students, those initiated by the teacher to the student, those initiated by the student to the teacher, and interactions between faculty members. Results from classroom observations are reported in a manner to protect anonymity of faculty.

In Classroom R, all student-to-student interactions were of an academic nature. Faculty-initiated interactions with students were outnumbered two to one by student-initiated interactions with faculty. The students formed a steady stream to the teacher's desk. Even though there was a continuous line at the teacher's desk with much verbal exchange, the room was relatively quiet. The atmosphere was business-like with the students usually asking one question before returning to their seats and their work. The teacher rarely had time to walk about the room to see if anyone needed help. It appeared as though those who did need help asked for and received it.

Classroom M was also business-like with very little student-to-student interaction. The teacher spent a good deal of time talking with students on an individual basis. The teacher and students interactions were warm and the room was characterized by a positive, friendly atmosphere. There were at least twice as many faculty-to-student interactions as there were student-to-faculty. The teacher moved about the room to check on each student's progress, stopping to sit with individual students and give extended help when it was needed.

In Classroom E, the teacher moved about the room a good deal during the observation, accurately anticipating when a student needed help. The teacher was light in her approach,

yet dealt mainly with academic matters. There were five instances of non-academic exchanges, but each instance pertained to the comfort of individual students in the room. Teacher-to-student interactions far outnumbered student-to-teacher with students consistently reacting positively to instruction.

The interactions in Classroom G initiated by the faculty and those initiated by students were almost equal in number. There were more non-academic exchanges than in other classrooms. During one observation, the number of non-academic exchanges equalled academic exchanges. The teacher was positive and supportive when giving directions or checking tests. She moved about the room very little and spent most of her time seated at a table with three students.

In Classroom T interactions between faculty and student were relaxed and pleasant. The room was not especially quiet, yet the students continued to work on their own when not working one-on-one with the teacher.

Comparisons Across Classrooms

In each classroom, the students showed a great deal of self responsibility. This was apparent by the steady flow of students coming and going into each room. The students got their own books and papers from the shelves or file cabinets. Each was responsible for his or her attendance card and for wisely using time. It was rare to see students talking together. When there were verbal exchanges, they were brief and not disruptive to the rest of the class.

Each teacher had an easy going, open manner that seemed to help the class flow smoothly. Each worked individually with several students during the course of the observations, sometimes moving about the room and asking if the students needed help. At other times, the students went to the teacher's desk with questions. The students appeared to be comfortable with each of the faculty members, using their time wisely and getting help when they needed it, but working on their own until they needed individual attention.

Document Analysis Results

Academic Performance

Between the beginning of school on September 28 and June 14, ninety-four students had earned a total of 382 half-credits toward graduation. Sixty-four students had earned

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from 0 to 5 half-credits; twenty-seven had earned from 7 to 10, and three students had earned from 11 to 13 half-credits. On permanent records from previous schools, credit units were recorded yearly; the PRIDE Center records half-credit units as they are completed.)

Number of Half-Credits Earned

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Number of Students	22	17	10	9	6	10	5	7	4	1	2	0	1

- Between the September 27, 1989, and June 14, 1990, students had earned an average of 4.3 half-credits per student. Because students enter and exit the PRIDE Center at different times, the number of half-credits earned was unique to each student. (To determine the average half-credits earned, the total number of half-credits earned was divided by the total number of students earning those half-credits. Students who attended by did not earn credits are not included in this calculation.)

- Students took an average of 1.4 months to earn each half-credit. Because students enter and exit the PRIDE Center largely on their own schedules, the length of time needed to earn a half-credit was unique to each student. (To determine the average length of time it took to earn a half-credit, the entrance date for each student was established. Next, the length of time elapsed from each student's entrance date to the date of their last half-credit earned was determined. Then amount of time was divided by the total number of half-credits each student earned. After each student's average time to earn a half-credit was determined, all of the lengths of time were totalled and divided by the total number of half-credits earned, thus reaching an average length of time to earn a half-credit.)

- After entering the PRIDE Center, 32% of the grades received were A's, 59% were B's, and 9% were C's.

Absences/Dismissals

- All but one of the students interviewed stated that they were absent less at the PRIDE Center. In reality, 14 were absent more than at their previous school, 21 were absent less, and 2 were absent the same amount based upon absences through the middle of May. The following table summarizes absences for students who were enrolled on April 24, 1990, and who have absence figures on their permanent records from the last school year

prior to the year of entry to the PRIDE Center. Withdrawal from school during that year is indicated by a "w" next to the absence figure.

	Number of Absences	
	One year prior to entry	While at the PRIDE Center
Student		
103	12	13
104	13	5
105	17w	38
106	10	10
107	9	14
110	9	6
111	4	10
112	8w	24
113	14	24
115	4	24
116	5	1
118	25	10
119	88	19
121	30w	14
122	21	6
123	18	6
124	16	16
125	20	5
126	16	8
131	22	13
132	23	6
133	34	8
136	8	15
139	10	5
140	3w	28
142	2	15
143	6	9
146	36w	9
147	9	26
150	3	1
151	24	29
152	10	11

153	29	8
154	9	11
155	26	13
159	22	41
160	20	53
161	32	31
166	33	20w
167	9	1
168	1	9
169	5	4
177	29	20

- Between September 28 and April 3, 31 students were dismissed from the PRIDE Center. Of that 33, two students were dismissed twice. Students were dismissed mainly for excessive absences.

Reason*	Number of Students Dismissed**
Absences/tardies	24
Failure to adhere to the PRIDE Contract	5
Lack of progress	2
Fighting on another campus	2
Parent request	1

*one student was dismissed for two reasons
**two students were dismissed twice

Of the 31 students who were dismissed during this time period, 14 earned half-credits toward graduation and eleven of those students reentered the PRIDE Center and earned half-credits after the dismissal. Clearly being dismissed did not prevent a sizeable number of dismissed students from returning to the PRIDE Center and making academic progress.

Results of the Culture-Free Self Esteem Inventory

- In terms of self esteem, 71% of the students were average or above average in overall score; 92% were average or above average on the social scale and 90% were average or above average on the personal self esteem scale. Seventy-eight percent were average or above average on the general self esteem scale. Because instruments were not administered in a pre-post fashion, these results cannot be attributed to directly to the program but do

serve to describe the group of students at the PRIDE Center. See Appendix A.

Conclusions

School context variables. School context variables associated with at-risk students were found in the PRIDE Center school students. When students answered questions directly addressing this topic, several themes emerged. Students mentioned that PRIDE students seemed more mature and less interested in the usual temptations of the high school life--partying and the like--than students at the previous schools. Very few students mentioned preparing for college at the previous schools, and several mentioned that their friends at the previous schools had also dropped out of school. In a few cases, students distinctly remembered comments by teachers or principals which contributed to the students' decisions to drop out of school. A significant number of PRIDE students had participated in some extracurricular activity but their statements trace a gradual withdrawal from those activities so that few were active by the time they either dropped out of the previous school or transferred to the PRIDE Center.

Many of the school context variables identified in the literature as associated with at-risk students appear to accompany the students who entered the PRIDE Center.

Changes in the school context variables for the PRIDE students focused upon changes in the atmosphere that students experience and in the structure of the schooling situation.

The foundation of the PRIDE Center rests upon the basic decision of the student to seek to attend the school. No student attends because he or she is assigned to attend. This commitment on the part of the student radically changes school context variables from coercive to supportive. The evidence to support this substantial.

Students clearly felt part of a family of learners, supported and accepted by faculty and other students. This feeling of acceptance from other students was stated as a contrast to the situation in the previous schools where students reported competition with others, feeling behind the rest of the class, and left out. Faculty intentionally strive to use positive reinforcement to foster a positive self-worth in students. The faculty assumed a clear responsibility for the motivation of students matched by a recognition on the part of students of their own role in their education. The faculty like and respect each student to an extent not usually experienced in public schools: when teachers were observed informally discussing school work and students, not one instance of sarcasm or cruel criticism was heard over a period of seven months. Students ceased to see school as a negative experience and began to feel that school had something to offer worth the time and effort to

attend and engage.

Students were also very aware that they were more responsible for their own success and their own failures at the PRIDE Center. Students have more choices at the PRIDE Center than at the previous schools, e.g., scheduling tests, deciding what amount of time to spend on a unit of material, and moving from class to class. While students were more responsible for their progress, they also felt more supported by the school in their endeavors. Students said that tutors and teachers were available to work individually with them. Teachers were observed working individually with virtually each student at some time during each class period visited. This assumption that students were responsible for their own work became more pronounced as the year progressed in the faculty.

In regard to student/teacher/principal relations, students uniformly felt the teachers and principal to be more caring, understanding, relaxed, and personal at the PRIDE Center than in their prior school experiences. Students felt free to ask for help when it was needed and that help would given willingly, without condescention or irritation. Faculty expressly mentioned the need to be able to listen to students as they describe their after school situations and lifestyles without being judgmental. Advisories held each day by faculty for small groups of students serve as settings for open exchanges and support from peers and faculty. The faculty expressed a sense of begin on a team working for the students, an attitude which was conveyed to students consistently though statements and actions. No teacher was overheard to make undermining statements to students about another teacher, another classroom, or the administration.

The most notable school context variable related to the structure of the school is the size of the school which averaged about 40 students in each session. The small size of the school strongly contributes to the sense of community for both faculty and students. Few students had attended a school with four faculty working with approximately 30 students (a ratio which results when one treats the morning and afternoon sessions as two separate schools.)

High on the list for both students and faculty was the self-paced nature of the PRIDE Center. Students valued having time to work at their own pace, whatever the pace, including the opportunity to speed ahead without waiting for the teacher to finish repeating explanations over and over. One student said that by the time he had finally figured out how to do the homework assignment, most of the time set aside for classwork had passed. He admitted that he didn't take work home to finish, and, as a consequence, he fell further and further behind. At the PRIDE Center, all work is done as classwork, where he can spend the time he needs and not feel like he is slipping behind more each day.

The fact that each student is taking essentially the "academic track" leading to a diploma removed the likelihood that students would form perceptions of their abilities based upon a tracking system.

The PRIDE Center has no extracurricular activities such as basketball or football; however, other organized activities are open to all students. Student took part in special projects like tutoring at elementary schools, food drives, and the district poetry contest. These activities redirects the emphasis upon competition for a place on the team to participation for community or school betterment.

The school rules are enforced when necessary but students perceive the faculty and principal to be fair and caring in the manner in which they deal with students. No student complained about the actions of the principal when disciplinary measures were used.

Students uniformly supported the PRIDE Center as they had experienced it. They consistently and independently used common terms to describe the PRIDE Center--success, self-paced, responsible, mature, flexibility, and caring. It is clear that the purpose, focus, and flavor of the new school was communicated early and effectively to students .

School performance/attitude variables. School performance/attitude variables associated with at-risk students were also explored for PRIDE students. Again several themes emerged from the data. Visits with the principal in the traditional school were often associated with a disciplinary action. While available school records did not record disciplinary actions and past offenses were not the focus of interview questions, students implied there were some problems in their previous schools. Absences were a major problem, escalating for the group with each year prior to entry to the PRIDE Center.

Students experienced significant academic problems prior to entry to the PRIDE Center. These problems included a high rate of retention in grade at the tenth grade of 28%. Course pass rates were highest for tenth graders (83% passed the majority of courses attempted) and lowest for the eleventh graders (50% passed the majority of courses attempted). In terms of grades earned, thirty-two percent of the grades earned were A or B and a significant proportion, 23%, were F. Clearly, students were not making adequate academic progress in the previous school settings.

Students reported that no one believed in them: not the teachers, not their friends, not themselves.

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Significant changes in these school performance/attitude variables were evident for the PRIDE students. Students appear understand their work better at the PRIDE Center because teachers explain more, students spend more time actually engaged in work, students work at their own pace, and they have more desire to learn. The kind of work is much the same as in the traditional schools--read, complete written assignment, take as exam. Better understanding of the work and more commitment to completing the work by students led to improved grades--91% of the grades earned were A or B and the remaining 9% were C. Students earned an average of 4.3 half-credits per student or 2.15 credits per student. The mastery learning system does not allow students to earn grades of F, fail a course, or be retained in grade. Each of these changes are accomplished by allowing the student the amount of time needed to learn the assigned material.

One anomalous finding concerned student absences at the PRIDE Center. While all but one of the students interviewed stated that they were absent less at the PRIDE Center, comparing school records reveals that fourteen were actually absent more than in the previous schools. Twenty-one were absent less. Being absent at the PRIDE Center impacts the student in a different way than being absent at the traditional schools. The class moves on when a student is absent; securing the work missed and figuring out how to so the homework without benefit of a teacher's explanation can be daunting to the student with low confidence or a good excuse the the student with low commitment. The discrepancy between student perceptions and the records may well be related to this difference in impact directly on the absent student. This speculation requires further investigation since student absences are closely associated with failure and eventual withdrawal from school, a permanent absence.

While most of the students had some idea of what they would like to do after graduating from secondary school, those plans had changed qualitatively as they attended the PRIDE Center. Plans for post-secondary study and work were poorly formulated or based upon inaccurate pictures of what is required to succeed in college or on a skilled job. The students did not change directions for post-secondary employment or schooling, but seemed confident in their own understandings of their strengths and skills and determined to follow through on their plans. They perceived this to be a change in themselves, and several attributed these changes to their experiences at the PRIDE Center.

Faculty reported that 90% of their time was spent teaching while 10% was spent in discipline. None had experienced this distribution of effort before in their teaching careers. Students rarely placed teachers in an adversarial position, a situation much more common in previous teaching settings.

While it is not possible to investigate the PRIDE Center's direct effects upon students' self esteem, is is possible to provide a description of students in comparison to published norms. Students scores, using the ranges of scores occurring between +/- 1 standard deviation of the mean are within one point of the published norms for the same ranges. In addition, the percentages of students scoring in the average or above average ranges are considerably above what would be expected of at-risk students who are usually described as having low self-esteem.

In terms of school performance and attitude variables, the PRIDE Center affected students in positive and powerful ways.

Program features. Many of the program features identified through the literature as associated with effective programs for at-risk students characterize the PRIDE Center. A significant body of work has examined programs for at-risk students to identify other features specific to the success of at-risk students. That body of work, while sometimes using a variety of terms in different studies to define common features, provides a basis for describing the PRIDE Center. Examining the studies cited earlier in this report, successful at-risk program contains the following:

a) efforts to build self esteem
b) recognition and reward system
c) mutual respect
d) positive social relationships among students and faculty
e) classroom community-building
f) a focus on teaching students rather than sorting students
g) relevant curriculum
h) personalized instruction
i) committed staff
j) teacher professionalism
k) flexibility

Programs with these features are associated with an increased desire to learn on the part of students and an enhanced academic performance.

Are these features evident in the PRIDE Center and in what ways? Clear examples of attempt to build student membership in the school have been presented. Teachers chair advisories each day; students express strong feelings of success and belonging; and, positive comments predominate in discussions and interviews. Each time a student graduates, a ceremony is held where the student, wearing a graduation cap and gown, is presented with a diploma by the superintendent. The ceremony is attended by a school

board member, members of the student's family, friends, and all the students and faculty of the PRIDE Center. Each time a student earns a half-credit, the student delivers a paper to the counselor who comments upon the accomplishment and adds the student's name to the list of students posted in the central hall. Originally each student's name was documented on a certificate posted on the wall; as the number of half-credits grew a new system was devised so that all names can be posted for recognition.

Faculty began the year with definite commitment to student success. Part of that commitment involved a disposition to be supportive of students, understanding of their situations, and bending over backyards to meet student needs. By the end of the year, the faculty commitment had tempered somewhat, leaning more toward letting the students stand on their own feet and refusing to accept excuses for failure. It appears that teachers began to strike a new balance between teacher support and student responsibility, with more emphasis upon student responsibility for making reasonable progress.

Faculty and staff exhibit a definite focus upon teaching students who have been ill served by traditional schools. Staff committed vast amounts of time to developing the initial curricula and are committed to improving that curricula for future years. Curricula are largely traditional in nature and do not appear to have incorporated more inherently interesting or job-relevant materials: During the initial year, staff became more comfortable selecting essential components of the content, in effect streamlining the curricula, and more confident in exercising professional judgment to make adjustments for individuals.

The faculty and staff began the year as largely as strangers and completed the year as a strong, mutually supportive team. A test of that spirit occurred with the hiring of a new teacher late in the year. The original team appears to be accepting, supportive, and willing to share their success with the new staff member.

Weekly staff meetings provide a time and opportunity for community-building among staff, sharing ideas, updating the status of student progress, and communicating basic administrative information. Teachers share decision-making authority in regard to school norms and procedures with the administrative staff.

Flexibility is one of the key words used by staff and students to describe the PRIDE Center. While much flexibility exists in terms of teacher decision-making, some flexibility for students has been restricted over the first year of operation. Major changes relate to practice of allowing students to "pass classes." Teachers felt that students were taking advantage of the option to pass a class, most likely one where they were not making

progress. As the year progressed, procedures were changed to shift more and more decision making to the teachers. By the end of the year, the teacher had to confer directly with the other teacher for permission for a student to pass the other teacher's class. It will be interesting to watch the evolution of the PRIDE Center to see what other procedures, eliminated at the beginning of the alternative school, reemerge in response to student behaviors.

A significant change which occurred with the opening of school year 1990-91 was a decision by the faculty and principal to raise the mastery standard from 70% to 80%. This clearly states that the faculty have confidence in the students' abilities to make academic progress and to make progress with increasingly high standards.

Parents. The perceptions of students toward school are often conveyed to parents in ways more accurate than those displayed at school. The sample of parents contacted for this study consistently verified the picture of the PRIDE Center conveyed by students and staff. Parents reported that students had a positive attitude toward a school reflected in their changes in behavior and dress. Parents were uniformly grateful for the opportunities offered their students.

A final note. This study was an attempt to provide a description of the first year of operation of an alternative high school seen through the eyes of its students and staff. It is rare that such an opportunity presents itself, that a group of individuals begins a new endeavor and is willing to have the watchful eye of outsiders invade the process. The faculty, staff, and students of the PRIDE Center were unfailing in their willingness to provide information, accommodate requests for data collection, and share their personal and professional ideas and thoughts. Tl at cooperation grew from their beliefs in themselves and what they have to offer. This document is dedicated to them.

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